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ABSTRACT

This paper describes four successful and innovative workplace-based literacy programs in the South. The first is a joint program for city municipal workers between the U.S. Naval Air Station in Memphis, Tennessee and the Memphis Literacy Coalition (Project Literacy-Memphis, Inc.). The second is a program at North Carolina State University in Raleigh that serves the school's custodial and maintenance staff. A third is a program at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company in Virginia, operated jointly with the local high school. The last is a citywide cooperative effort involving four employers in Albertville, Alabama. In addition, a concluding section summarizes some of the steps that Southern Growth Policies Board states have taken over the past year to meet the objective of the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South to "mobilize resources to eliminate adult illiteracy by 1992." (YLB)

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Foresight
Model Programs for Economic Development

June 1987

Southern Growth Policies Board

Learning While Earning: Worksite Literacy Programs

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Summary

New jobs in the South require higher levels of proficiency in basic skills than ever before. A growing number of employers are providing adult basic education to their employees on site, both as a civic responsibility and as an economic imperative — so that the employee is able to adjust to changes in the workplace, be more productive, and have more opportunities for advancement. As a convenient and familiar setting, the worksite is an effective place to reach adults in need of basic education.

This issue describes innovative and effective adult literacy programs in four employer-based sites: a university in North Carolina, a naval base in Tennessee, a large company in Virginia, and a coordinated community program in Alabama. An added section reviews recent state initiatives aimed at meeting one objective of the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South to "mobilize resources to eliminate adult functional illiteracy by 1992."

Literacy, Employment, and Productivity

"It was an awful shock when we assessed the work force in one of our plants and found that 87 percent of our employees were incapable of doing work beyond the fifth grade."

General Motors official[1]

Businesses and employees alike are faced with the unsettling knowledge that the literacy requirements of the workplace are rising faster than the literacy levels of the adult work force. Fewer and fewer jobs, both in manufacturing and services, are available to people who lack basic skills. For example, the airport skycap interviewed by Studs Turkel in Working described his job as including reading schedules, selling tickets and arranging for hotel reservations. "They think of us as a strong back and weak mind. They don't realize that what we're doing is the same thing they get when they walk to a counter."

The most rapid change is occurring in manufacturing. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs in the occupational category "operators, fabricators, and laborers," which most workers with minimal education have been able to learn at the workplace, are projected to grow only 7 percent between 1984 and 1995 — less than every category except farmers and private household workers. In addition, many of those employed as operators, fabricators, or laborers in the future will work on computerized and automated lines and will need greater ability to reason and understand and manipulate symbols. The cost of automated equipment is too high and the impact of mistakes too great to leave the work to unskilled employees. An automated Mazda plant that started up recently gave applicants a two-hour written test in reading, writing, and math to find out who was qualified for further consideration.

The uneducated worker is more likely to be displaced from his or her job and remain out of work longer.[2] According

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Creating strategies for economic development

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to U.S. Department of Labor data, three-fourths of those unemployed cannot be retrained for new jobs because they lack basic skills, including reading and writing. The ability to read and understand basic instructions, place a decimal point, or fill out report forms is becoming essential for even entry-level work. The adult without a high-school education is four times as likely to be unemployed as the adult with a high-school education.

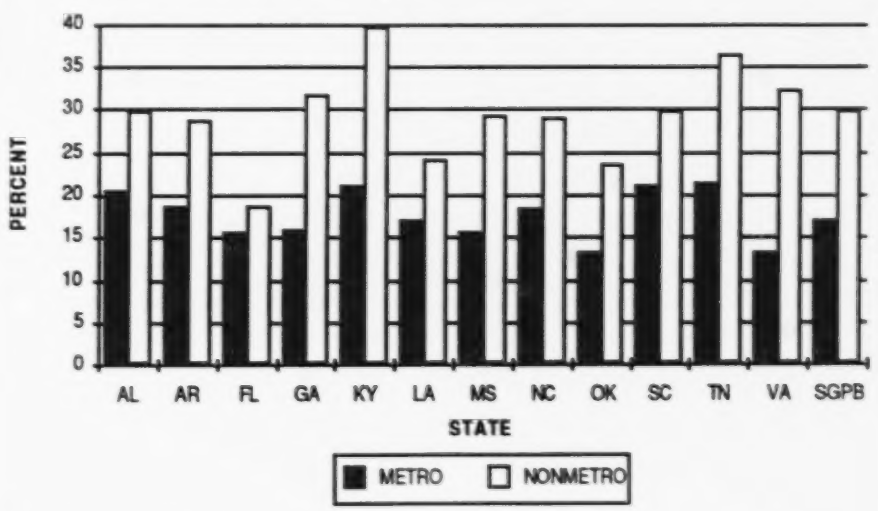
A recent survey of employers[3] reveals both the scale of the problem and the fact that it is not restricted to low-skilled occupations or entry-level employees. More than half of the companies that responded identified significant writing and math deficiencies among secretaries and laborers and supervisors and management. The low productivity associated with lack of basic skills and the high costs of re-education led to the heavy involvement of the private sector in recent education reforms. Many of the corporations are taking matters into their own hands and teaching basic skills in-house. Seventy-five percent of the businesses responded that they conduct basic education for their employees for skills that should have been learned by the 10th grade. According to research conducted by the Conference Board, an association of business leaders, one out of every five banks and insurance companies provide basic education programs.

Functional Illiteracy in the South

Illiteracy in the South's work force is clearly a barrier to improved economic opportunities for its people and a threat to the future economic competitiveness of the region. In the South in 1980, the median income of adults with less than eight years of school was only 49 percent of the median income of those who had completed high school but had not attended college. Two out of every 10 adults (age 25 and over) living in metropolitan counties, three out of every 10 adults living in non-metropolitan counties, and more than four out of every 10 black adults living in rural areas had not gone beyond the eighth

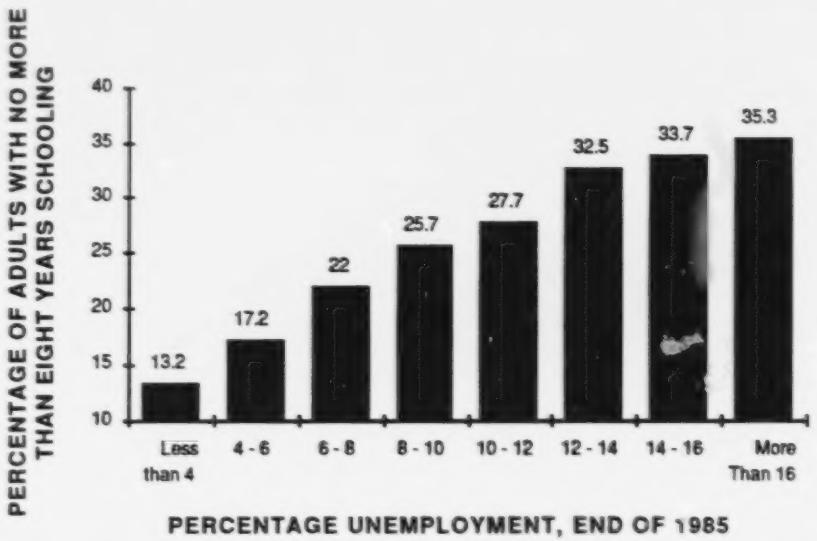
"Three-fourths of those unemployed cannot be retrained for new jobs because they lack basic skills, including reading and writing."

Figure 1. Percentage of Adults Who Had Not Completed 8th Grade, 1980



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980

Figure 2. Unemployment and Illiteracy, SGPB South



Source: Southern Growth Policies Board, 1987

grade. Although educational attainment is a weak proxy for functional illiteracy, it is safe to assume that most people who dropped out of school before high school do not possess a fifth-grade reading ability, which is a commonly accepted working definition of functional illiteracy. Further, rates of functional illiteracy are much higher in non-metro counties than in metro counties (see Figure 1, opposite page), which suggests that illiteracy may be in part responsible for the lower rate of economic growth in the rural South than in the urban South.

An analysis of rates of functional illiteracy in relation to end-of-1985 unemployment rates in SGPB counties (see *Figure 2,* above) shows that, on average, those *counties with the lowest rates of eighth-grade completion had the highest rates of unemployment and the slowest growth.* In counties with less than 4 percent unemployment, only an average of 13.2 percent of adults had not gone beyond eighth grade. In contrast, in counties with more than 16 percent unemployment, the average proportion of adults with no more than eight years of schooling was nearly three times as high — 35.3 percent.

The diminishing number of jobs open to the functionally illiterate and the rising costs of illiteracy to the region inspired the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South to place adult literacy high on its list of priorities. The report of the Commission, *Halfway Home and a Long Way to Go,* states bluntly that "the level of adult illiteracy in America is a disgrace." One of the 10 regional objectives proposed in the report is *to mobilize resources to eliminate adult functional illiteracy by 1992.* The report further recommends that each state launch a literacy task force in 1987.

Despite growing concern about illiteracy among adults, no one can accuse the federal government of throwing

"Those counties with the lowest rates of eighth-grade completion had the highest rates of unemployment and the slowest growth."

money at the problem. Last year it appropriated approximately $100 million, or less than $4 for every adult in the nation with less than eight years of education. States are increasing their own appropriations, but these efforts are still not enough, given the magnitude of the problem. The median expenditure per student in adult basic education last year was $98; the average cost of a child in elementary or high school was $3,600. Author Jonathan Kozol calls for nothing less than "a multibillion dollar imperative that puts universal literacy in the United States on exactly the same level as nutrition, health care, unemployment compensation, and defense."[4] The Commission recommends that states "provide resources commensurate to the task now." "Education," the Commission's report asserts, "is never as expensive as ignorance."

Adult literacy, however, will not be remedied by more money alone. It is a goal that has proven resistant to political and policy solutions. Unlike the education of youth, who comprise a captive audience under states' compulsory attendance laws, adults have to want to improve their skills and seek out help. Many are hesitant to re-enter the same system that either they failed or that failed them before. The dropout rates of adult basic education programs range from 23 percent to 48 percent. *Successful programs require innovative and relevant strategies as well as forceful leadership and sufficient resources.*

One place with a high potential to successfully reach and teach one segment of the illiterate population — employed functionally illiterate adults — is the worksite. Programs that operate at the place of work have the advantage of being familiar, convenient, and relatively comfortable, since the participant is among friends and fellow workers. Further, the program content can be linked to the everyday experiences and needs of the student.

This paper describes four successful and innovative workplace-based literacy programs in the South.[5] The first is a joint program for city municipal workers between the U.S. Naval Air Station in Memphis, Tennessee, and the Memphis Literacy Coalition. The second is a program at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, that serves the school's custodial and maintenance staff. A third is a program at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company in Virginia, operated jointly with the local high school. And the last is a citywide cooperative effort involving four employers in Albertville, Alabama. In addition, a concluding section summarizes some of the steps SGPB states have taken over the past year to meet the objective of the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South to "Mobilize Resources to Eliminate Adult Illiteracy by 1992."

Project Literacy - Memphis, Inc.: The U.S. Navy and Community Responsibility

When the national media networks began their literacy campaign in the summer of 1986, the city of Memphis took the challenge to heart. As of 1980, Shelby County, which includes the city of Memphis, had 80,000 adults over age 25 (18 percent of the metro area's adult population) who had not completed eighth grade. A coalition of concerned citizens formed Project Literacy-Memphis, Inc., with its stated purpose being "to seek the elimination of illiteracy and improve the basic skills of the general population in Memphis and Shelby County; to enhance and coordinate other organizations' efforts which provide literacy services in the community." According to the literacy project's business plan, "if Memphis is to successfully compete for its share of the economic pie, significant progress in basic skills is mandatory."

The coalition was chaired by Admiral David L. Harlow, who is in charge of the Naval Air Station Command in Millington, about 20 miles north of Memphis. For some time, the armed sevices had

"'Education,' the Commission's report asserts, 'is never as expensive as ignorance.'"

been faced with recruits who lacked the basic skills to complete the technical training programs. Consequently, the armed services offered considerable basic education. That particular naval base had developed a short-term total immersion program called Academic Remedial Reading (ARR) for its recruits which had proven very successful. The average improvement in reading levels after a 17-day program was 2.3 grade levels; and, two-thirds of those who entered the program, all of whom performed below the sixth-grade level, were able to go on to the Navy's technical schools. The Admiral believed that a program which was successful with recruits ought to work with civilians, and he proposed that the city emulate the model for a group of its own employees.

Twenty participants who read between grades 3.0 and 5.9 were sought from the city's Sanitation and Parks Department. Sixteen applied for the 10-day program — 11 of whom were actually non-readers — and all were accepted. The students were predominantly black, male, middle-aged, married, and had an average of just over four years of schooling. Seven had an annual income of below $14,000, and none earned more than $18,000 per year. The participants were confident about their ability to perform on the job, but not about their ability to cope in a print-oriented society. All had experienced failure in school settings.

All participants were paid for the full 10 days they attended classes. They were picked up at their workplace, bused to the base for the instruction, and returned to the workplace so their normal routine would not be disturbed. Thus, even though technically the education did not occur at the worksite, participants went to and left their place of employment at their regular working hours. In addition, the base provided breakfast and lunch.

On the first day, each person was given a reading test and assigned to one of three groups: (a) those who needed reading for better understanding; (b) those who knew the alphabet and sounds but needed instruction in reading simple sentences; and (c) those who did not know even the alphabet.

All completed the program on May 15, 1987 with increases in reading levels ranging from 0.5 years to 6.0 years. The average improvement was 3.6 grade levels. Just as important as the improvement was the change program staff observed in the self-esteem of the participants. The program changed the materials used in the Navy program so that they would be relevant to the lives of the participants. One of the most successful was the daily newspaper, which was delivered to each participant every morning. As they learned to read, they visibly carried the papers to their homes (where there was little available reading matter) as evidence that they were no longer illiterate. Further, the esprit de corps that developed within the group led the faster learners to tutor the slower learners and help them along. Perhaps most importantly, the participants expressed a desire to continue their learning, and 15 of the 16 signed up for follow-up classes in the city Adult Basic Education (ABE) program.

The program was a success, both in its impact on the participants and in what was learned from the program for improving subsequent programs. For example, the program administrators found that it is critical that the hearing and eyesight of every participant be tested. They also learned that the attention spans of the students were shorter than anticipated, and the curriculum was redesigned with mini-lessons so that subjects would change every 15 to 20 minutes. The subject matter used turned out to be very important as well, and was carefully screened to be relevant to adult learners.

"The esprit de corps that developed within the group led the faster learners to tutor the slower learners and help them along."

As a result of the success of the pilot program, another has been started for the civilian employees of the Memphis Defense Depot, chosen in part due to recent reports of low productivity. Twenty students with reading levels between grades 3.0 and 5.9 were selected. Two variations from the earlier program were that local adult basic education teachers were used and no breakfast was provided.

The cost of the program for the 16 students, which did not include their pay for the period, was $4,260, of which $1,200 was a non-recurring class materials cost and $1,600 was the cost of meals. The success of the program has led the Memphis Literacy Coalition to recommend, in a strategic business plan released June 12, 1987, a major expansion of the effort to hard-core unemployed workers, inmates of correctional institutions, and high-school students as well as employees of local businesses. Furthermore, the plan recommends close working relationships with community organizations, including churches, YMCAs, and Boys Clubs.

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North Carolina State University's Literacy Program: Expanding Horizons

The Physical Plant Adult Basic Education Program on the campus of North Carolina State University (NCSU) in Raleigh teaches service employees basic literacy skills and prepares them for high school equivalency exams. The NCSU Department of Human Resources estimates that some 400 to 500 employees on campus do not have a high-school education. Still others have received a diploma or certificate but are still functionally illiterate.

About 10 years ago, the university began offering literacy classes to this group of employees, provided that their supervisors would approve the four hour per week class commitment. Notice of the program is primarily word-of-mouth; recent classes have been made up of between 25 and 35 students.

Ninety-eight percent of the participants are black. Over 80 percent work as painters, tile layers, motor pool employees, housekeepers, and groundskeepers. Most are in their 30s or 40s. These employees, who have always made up the majority of the program, are in the most physically demanding and lowest-paying jobs in the university. Their jobs require only a third-grade education, and since most other jobs require a high school diploma or its equivalent, these employees have few prospects for either promotions or better-paying jobs.

Nearly all the students were raised and worked on farms where chores took priority over school, which was thought to have little relationship or benefit to farm work and life. Students tell of how they only went to school on rainy days when laboring on the farm was impractical. Also, some have spoken about the poor educational opportunities and facilities for blacks 20 to 30 years ago. Many migrated to the cities, where they found that lack of literacy skills barred them from most employment opportunities. Life in the city demanded greater dependence on reading and writing. For most of those who cannot read and write and for many of those without a diploma, low-paying service work has been their only option.

This program is the University's attempt to provide basic literacy and GED education for employees. The program offers three classes: (1) an adult basic reading and writing class (ABE) for students who have a fourth- grade or lower reading level; (2) an intermediate class for students who have a fifth- to eighth-grade reading level; and (3) a GED class which prepares students to take the GED test. The classes extend over an 11-month period. Students are

"Businesses and employees alike are faced with the unsettling knowledge that the literacy requirements of the workplace are rising faster than the literacy levels of the adult work force."

given a commitment of work-release time of four hours weekly in order to attend classes, but there are instances during the year when they are not allowed to attend class due to job requirements.

NCSU's program has a unique philosophy and pedagogy based on the idea that all adults come to the classroom with skills, talents and rich experiences of which literacy is only one. Stressing the resources that adults bring with them — knowledge of themselves and the world they live in —rather than focusing on their "deficiencies" is central to the program. It attempts to counteract students' histories of failures, deficits, and powerlessness.

Students meet in groups rather than individually with a tutor. These group meetings allow them to develop friendships and use skills other than reading and writing to relate, compare, and analyze experiences. In this more social atmosphere, students develop relationships, help one another, and begin to see their and others' skills and strong points, which help balance their low self-assessment as readers and writers. One-to-one tutoring relationships all too often silently assume that one learns and one teaches; one possesses knowledge, one does not. Group instruction more nearly equalizes the relationship, allowing all to teach and learn, and broadens literacy education from the teaching and learning of basic phonics skills to an arena of adult experience in which a variety of skills are uncovered, used and reinforced.

The primary sources of instructional materials are the students' own experiences. Oral as well as written responses are transcribed and edited for continuity and appropriate reading level and then duplicated for use as reading and language arts materials. Students' own lives and concerns help widen the curriculum from individual experiences to larger ones including community, historical, and cultural concerns. Thus, the program relies on materials that are historically and culturally interesting and relevant. For example, one class composed of women read selections about black women under slavery; the ABE class continually uses poems by Langston Hughes as materials for reading, response and imitation. For some, this is a first exposure to black history and culture; for others, it is the most sustained exposure in a school setting. Using students' own stories and culture generates greater participation and pride in their lives as they discover that their community's history and culture is worthy of study.

The program has published two curriculum manuals through the University's Department of Adult and Community College Education, which houses the program. *Making Sense: An Adult Basic Education Culture and Language Workbook*, by Dr. Wendy Luttrell, takes interviews with ABE students from across the state about their school experiences and converts them to materials for reading, discussion and language art. *Dream Variations: An Adult Basic Education Culture and Language Workbook* by Luttrell and Robert Shreefter uses poems and songs by black poets and writers such as Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, and Billie Holiday for basic readers and writers to read, analyze and discuss, and includes students' own compositions. These manuals challenge the views that ABE students cannot deal with content before learning and mastering phonics, word endings, and spelling and the idea that work-based literacy programs must teach only job-related literacy skills.

The workplace, as a community in which people get to know each other and form relationships, can be an ideal place for literacy programs. Students can draw on common problems and experiences, making classes more cohesive. Workplace programs in-

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crease job satisfaction; many participants in the NCSU program, for example, praise supervisors who allow them to attend classes and appreciate their support. The promise of better jobs with better wages by earning a diploma creates a sense that employers are interested in mobility for employees and that jobs are not dead ends, although economic outcomes are difficult to document. Of five who recently continued on through the GED, one left the school for a better job, one got a promotion at the university, one retired (her diploma was a life-long dream that she wished to fulfill for herself and her grandchildren), and two remain in their same positions.

The gains in reading levels for the participants have ranged from 1.5 to 2.0 grade levels. Indirect benefits to the university, according to the director, are more qualified employees who are less prone to be absent and to feel frustrated by lack of qualifications and opportunities. Most importantly, workplace programs represent an active commitment by the employer to eradicate illiteracy and to accommodate adults who have multiple responsibilities.

Despite the likely economic benefits, the motivation behind this particular program is more altruistic than economic. It is a case more of community service than plant efficiency, which probably reflects the difficulty educational institutions have in measuring output. The university has budgeted $15,000 through the Physical Plant Department for the program, which pays the cost of a part-time coordinator/instructor. The school also provides in-kind assistance, such as classroom and office space, duplicating, phone and utilities. Requests for class materials and supplies are handled on an individual basis.

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Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, Virginia: A Case of Corporate Leadership

In the fall of 1985, the local newspaper in Newport News sponsored the Peninsula Literacy Congress seminar on adult literacy. In the audience were two managers of Newport News Shipbuilding, the state's largest (about 28,000 employees) and one of its oldest (more than 100 years) employers.

To remain competitive, production methods and equipment at the shipyard are changing constantly, which means continual retraining and requalification of the work force. The company operates an extensive education and training program, which includes an apprenticeship program and a tuition reimbursement program as well as retraining to upgrade skills.

The shipbuilding industry today is undergoing more radical changes than ever before. New "modularized" ship construction builds the hull in sections and then fills it with components. According to the manager of the company's Training Systems and Services, "retaining our competitive edge means utilizing innovative technologies, which can only be done with a work force that can read, understand, and adapt to changing trends." Much of the work, in fact, now uses robots and other computerized equipment, which require higher-order skills and education than in the past. However, that portion of the company's work force which was hired years ago when manual skills sufficed for most jobs is relatively uneducated. Some cannot read, write, or do simple math and, thus, are not able to qualify for new work. A desire to improve the opportunities for its older employees and to perform a service to the community led the company and the local school system to request a plan-

"Retaining our competitive edge means utilizing innovative technologies, which can only be done with a work force that can read, understand, and adapt to changing trends."

ning grant from the state to develop a literacy component within their training program.

A state grant from federal Adult Basic Education funds to determine the extent of functional illiteracy at the shipyard and to design a program was awarded in late fall 1985 to the Newport News school system. It worked closely with the company during the planning phase to assess the company's needs and design appropriate programs. The needs were readily identified by supervisors; in addition to the difficulty they experienced retraining functionally illiterate workers, all supervisors indicated that in the long run, better-educated employees are an asset to productivity at the shipyard. The target population was established to be all shipyard employees whose reading skills were below the fifth grade level.

After the plan was completed and submitted, the state gave the school system $50,000 in federal funds to run a pilot program. Newport News Shipbuilding provided the required 10 percent matching funds of $5,000. The company, at its own expense, completely renovated and refurbished a room in one of its engineering buildings; it built study carrels, partitioned class instructional areas, hid all pipes, added wall-to-wall carpeting and lighting, and repainted. A personal computer also was made available to students.

The program, called simply *The Reading Program*, began in September 1986. It was designed to operate from Monday through Thursday between 1 P.M. and 7 P.M., so that employees could come either just before or just after their shift, which changes at 4 p.m. Employees could adjust their programs to fit their own schedules and individual needs. Two full-time reading teachers work with employees, who typically spend about three hours per week at the facility.

The company began an extensive publicity campaign to encourage employees to come into the program, using posters, notices, and messages on employees' paycheck stubs. In addition, they installed a 24-hour 800-number hotline for employees who commute long distances to work — including from North Carolina — to call for information.

The plant held an open house, inviting all employees to come in and learn more about the program. Sixteen employees expressed interest and scheduled interviews for admission. The interview was designed to be casual and non-threatening; applicants simply talked about their backgrounds — their early education experiences, families, work and interests — and the interviewer helped them develop goals. The individual needs of each also were assessed. As the program progressed, word spread and applications increased. By June 1987, there were 55 people in the program.

The program took an eclectic approach to reading, using a combination of techniques that incorporated into the curriculum materials related to the work and living experiences of the clients. Participants learned about money management and health care as well as shipyard safety and work-related communications. Three generic areas were included in the curriculum of all students: shipyard safety regulations, chemical hazard awareness, and credit union procedures and forms.

The pilot project ended on June 30, 1987 and is in the process of being evaluated. The degree of satisfaction, based on preliminary results and anecdotal evidence, however, is so high that a commitment has been made for a second year with increased corporate support. Two of the participants — one who began at a fourth-grade reading level — progressed enough to pass their GED exams. For

"The program took an eclectic approach to reading, using a combination of techniques that incorporated into the curriculum materials related to the work and living experiences of the clients."

the 1987-88 year, the program will be a three-way partnership, with the state and local school systems providing $25,000 and the company providing $25,000. The program also intends to expand the use of computers and experiment with computer-based curricula.

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Albertville Business/Industry Education Program, Alabama:
The Albertville City School System in Marshall County, Alabama, established as an independent city system in 1985, uses its Community Education Program as a catalyst to bring together resources to improve the quality of life in this fast-growing rural area. One of the successful components of the Community Education Program in Albertville is an experimental, collaborative effort among local industries, the city school system, and the Northeast Alabama Area Adult Basic Education Program. The program is designed for workers in area industries, many of whom left school at an early age to contribute to their family's income and who were unlikely to be reached through regular Adult Basic Education programs. As a new school system, its strategy is to extend services to local industries by improving the current work force, thereby demonstrating to the business community an immediate return on their tax dollars.

Albertville, with a population of 15,000 in 1985, is the largest city in Marshall County, one of the fastest-growing counties in the state. Like many rural, agricultural counties in the South, Marshall County has been transformed over the past two decades by an influx of industry. The growth of new industries has awakened local leaders and area employers to the need to upgrade the educational level of the work force. In 1980, only 50 percent of Marshall County residents 25 years old and older had completed high school. Thirty percent had less than an eighth-grade education. While the ABE Program was serving area adults seeking to improve their academic skills, it did not have the funds or personnel to offer training at worksites, where educators felt learners would find a less threatening environment and a more relaxed atmosphere for learning.

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With the participation of four area industries recruited by the Community Education Program and a $14,000 grant through the State Department of Education using federal Adult Basic Education Act funds, the Business/Industry Education Program was launched in the summer of 1986. The four employers, Keyes Fibre, Arrow Shirt Company, Kendall Company, and the City of Albertville, were represented on an Advisory Council, which contributed their observations and suggestions throughout the program. Each surveyed its employees to determine their education levels and assist in designing the curriculum appropriate at each site. According to Dr. John Schaerer, superintendent of schools, at least one of the chief executive officers was shocked to find that nearly half of his employees had not graduated from high school.

The response by employees was more enthusiastic than expected. The original proposal planned for 75 participants, but 140 actually completed the program, which ran from September of 1986 through May of 1987. Workers at Keyes Fibre were instructed in advanced mathematics to prepare them for changes in the production process that

would require an understanding of algebraic concepts. The focus of instruction at the other three sites was on the acquistion of basic reading, writing and math skills, as well as "life-coping" skills. Each participant was tested individually to determine his or her current skill level. Since all of the classes had students with varying skill levels, including workers who were functionally illiterate, volunteer tutors worked individually with students. Depending on class preference, a variety of instructional methods were used, ranging from lectures to group discussions.

Except at the Keyes Fibre plant, where employees were allowed work-release time to attend a three-hour class each week, the classes were scheduled between shifts for those either coming on or going off their shift. The industries provided classroom space, conference rooms, materials, media equipment and snacks. Each company paid the $20 fee for its employees who took the GED exam. The total contribution from employers was estimated at about $40,000.

According to Alice Duckett, coordinator for community education for the city schools, one of the primary reasons for the success of the program has been the enthusiastic support of the plant managers. Announcements about the program were made at each plant, and notices were placed in company newsletters. Employees were given open encouragement throughout the program by their supervisors. The mayor of Albertville hosted a dinner to honor city employees who participated in the program, and presented a $50 bonus to those who completed the test for their GED. The program received favorable publicity on a wider scale when the local Alabama PBS television station highlighted the Albertville program during an hour-long presentation on adult illiteracy in the state. Other local industries, encouraged by the success of the program's first year, are lining up to participate in next year's program, which will be expanded to offer training at eight industries.

More than half of the employees who strengthened their basic educational skills through the program went on to complete their GED. At least 80 percent of those who participated in the program indicated that they would not have attended an ABE program if it had not been offered at their worksite. Besides the sense of self-fulfillment experienced by the worker/students, there also was increased esprit de corps noted at the workplace. Superintendent Schaerer believes that "the level of consciousness in our area relative to the importance of education has been and continues to be raised." *The program has been funded for the upcoming school year and will expand to include four new businesses.* According to project coordinator Alice Duckett, the pioneering program participants should feel pride not just in their personal accomplishment, but also because "they have opened the way for other employees across the state to have programs like this."

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Commentary
In each of the successful programs described, there were common themes and common criteria for success, as well as some common challenges still to be met.

- The employer played a key role and in fact instigated the program. Employers supported the programs as civic and social responsibilities, but also as a means of improving productivity and reducing costs.

- The programs were eclectic, using various combinations of techniques to

"More than half of the employees who strengthened their basic educational skills through the program went on to complete their GED."

find the one that worked best with each individual. Materials were selected based on their relevancy to the work, interests, and basic needs of the individual.

• National media attention to the plight of the illiterate — particularly Operation Plus — played a part in stimulating action in two of the sites, Memphis and Newport News.

• Financial support was shared, with the employer contributing a significant share, in both operating funds and in-kind support. Federal funds from the Adult Basic Education Act, however, were critical to starting up two of the programs.

• Three of the programs provided employees with some paid release time for instruction.

Despite these valiant attempts to eliminate illiteracy in the South, only a small percentage of those estimated to lack basic literacy skills are being reached. These and the many other fine programs that were not highlighted are still too small and too few to have a significant impact on a problem of such great magnitude. However, they do provide hope that many more employers will emulate these programs and that individuals willing to devote the time and energy to improving their skills will be rewarded with better economic opportunities.

New Southern Initiatives

Nearly every SGPB state has acted to meet the goal of the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South of reducing adult illiteracy rates by 1992. Governors and legislators have accelerated efforts in recent months, creating new commissions or task forces, initiating new programs and adding funds.

Alabama

Governor Guy Hunt's office is planning a Governor's Conference on Illiteracy for the fall of 1987.

Arkansas

Referring to reports of both the Commission on the Future of the South and Jobs for Arkansas' Future Commission, Governor Bill Clinton, in his 1987 State of the State Address, announced the formation of a statewide *Adult Education and Literacy Council.* It will oversee and coordinate an expansion of existing programs and initiate new programs to increase the number being served by two-thirds. About $2.8 million in General Revenue funding was requested for activities such as computer-assisted instruction, day care, tutor training, prison programs, and a special rural outreach intended to "raise the educational level of adults by 50 percent by 1992."

Florida

In Florida, Governor Bob Martinez and the Legislature have both raised the priority for adult basic education. *Senate Bill 799* establishes and funds seven *Literacy Councils* to identify adults in need of education and match them to programs. It also assigns responsibility for the state plan for adult literacy to the State Department of Education. Another new program, created in the *Florida Employment Opportunities Act, House Bill 1428*, will require that all AFDC applicants be assessed for literacy skills and, if lacking basic skills, enroll in a program to qualify for aid. The bill goes into effect on October 1, 1987.

Georgia

Governor Joe Frank Harris announced the formation of a 25-member *Adult Literacy Task Force* and charged it to "develop a reasonable and businesslike plan" to address illiteracy in the state. The Task Force was asked to submit a report to him by January 1988 recommending programs, responsibilities, services, a funding mechanism, and an operational plan. Members represent the business and education communities and Georgia's General Assembly.

"Nearly every SGPB state has acted to meet the goal of the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South of reducing adult illiteracy rates by 1992."

Kentucky
In January 1986, the Kentucky Legislature passed *House Bill 6*, an education reform package that established the *Kentucky Literacy Commission* and authorized funding for adult literacy for the biennium to support, for example, new initiatives and the expansion of existing volunteer programs. The Commission is administered by the Education and Humanities Cabinet post, which is held at present by Governor Martha Layne Collins. As of July 10, 1987, the Commission has recommended total funding of $491,323 for 78 programs; additional applications totaling $250,000 are still under review.

Louisiana
The Louisiana legislature was the first to enact legislation to respond to *Halfway Home and a Long Way to Go*. The Louisiana legislature passed *House Concurrent Resolution No. 33* last winter, submitted by State Representative and SGPB member Mary Landrieu along with nine other members of the House, to "create a *task force on adult illiteracy* to examine needs, evaluate costs, and recommend a *permanent mechanism for reducing adult functional illiteracy*." The bill cites the objective of 1986 Commission on the Future of the South as part of its rationale. The 22-member task force is charged with reporting back to the legislature with recommendations to the Joint Committee on Education at least 60 days prior to the 1988 regular session.

Mississippi
Governor William Allain appointed a statewide Adult Learners Task Force in October 1985, and the state has been implementing its recommendations. The governor initiated a *statewide media campaign* against illiteracy, and worked with industry and the junior colleges on literacy pre-training programs. Also, the state Board of Education has endorsed adult literacy as one of its priorities.

North Carolina
With *Executive Order Number 32*, Governor James Martin instituted the *Governor's Commission on Literacy*. In March 1987, William Friday, president emeritus of the University of North Carolina, accepted the chairmanship. The Commission will coordinate the adult basic education program, adult basic literacy education program, Project Plus, and other ongoing literacy projects in the state. The governor has proclaimed 1987 as *The Year of the Reader*. The state community college system, assuming responsibility for adult literacy as recommended by the Commission on the Future of the South, is designing interactive literacy programs over TV cable to reach adults in their homes. The Mary Reynolds Babcock and Z. Smith Reynolds foundations provided a total of $75,000 for the project.

Oklahoma
Governor Henry Bellmon signed into law on June 3, 1987 *Joint Resolution No. 17*, which declared illiteracy an emergency situation. The bill included "directing a *greater investment of state resources* in programs to teach reading and to improve literacy of adults," "asking for private assistance," and "creating a *task force on literacy*." The task force is to submit its recommendations to the governor, speaker of the House, and president pro tempore of the Senate by the 10th legislative day of the 41st Oklahoma Legislature.

South Carolina
On May 5, 1987, Governor Carroll Campbell named a Committee on Literacy and asked it to *prepare a strategic plan* to address the state's problems. According to the governor, "too many South Carolinians are not prepared to take advantage of opportunities we are trying to make available. They are being hurt; their families are being hurt; our economy is being hurt." The plan, including a budget request, will be submitted to the General Assembly no later than January 1988.

Tennessee

In Tennessee, a state plan for an Adult Literacy Initiative was transmitted to Governor Ned McWherter on June 18, 1987. It called for, among other things, the *establishment of a statewide Governor's Advisory Council* on Adult Education; training of a corps of teachers to teach literacy and development of a corps of Tennessee Tomorrow students to provide peer tutoring to others; development of full-time year-round literacy programs in all counties; and *development of workplace literacy programs in all major businesses and industries.* The latter is underway, with the aluminum, hosiery, garment, mining, and military selected as the first five industries for programs. The state has doubled its budget for adult basic education, and redirected more of the funds to programs for adults who read at between zero and fourth-grade levels.

Virginia

Virginia has a *two-pronged approach to adult literacy*. Governor Gerald Baliles is creating a new *state adult literacy committee* composed of the heads of five major state boards and commissions. Its director, who will report to the committee chairman, will coordinate all literacy activities now going on in eight state agencies, including education, corrections and aging. At the same time, the first lady of Virginia is organizing the *Virginia Literacy Foundation*, which will bring together major players from the private sector, volunteer and community organizations, and the public sector to raise money and coordinate programs.

Footnotes

[1] Quoted in *New Realities, New Opportunities for Industrial Technology Partnerships* by Dr. Jack Williams, Director of the Office of Productivity, Technology, and Innovation, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, June 8, 1987).

[2] Richard M. Cyert and David C. Mowbry (Ed.), *Technology and Employment: Innovation and Growth in the U.S. Economy* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1987).

[3] James F. Henry, "Expectations of the Workplace: Basic Skills in the U.S. Workforce," *Functional Literacy in the Workplace* (Washington, DC: Council on Life Insurance, 1984).

[4] Jonathan Kozol, *Illiterate America* (New York: Anchor Press, 1985).

[5] For other successful programs, see earlier issue of this series, "Economic Survival Skills: The Aim of Adult Basic Education," *Foresight 1* (September, 1983).

The Associate Membership Program of the Southern Growth Policies Board

Background

The Southern Growth Policies Board is a public, interstate agency dedicated to creating economic development strategies for the South. It is supported and governed by the governors of its 12 member states and territory. They are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

The Associate Membership Program addresses economic challenges in the South by encouraging a partnership between the public and private sectors. Associate Members include corporations, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions.

Dues from the Associate Membership Program go into the Fund for the Future of the South, a permanent source of financial support for the Board. The Fund is used to carry out special projects in economic development and other areas crucial to implementing the 10 Regional Objectives proposed by the 1986 Commission on the Future of the South.

Corporations may become Associate Members by paying tax-deductible annual dues of at least $1,000. Dues for public, non-profit organizations begin at $250 per year. Any corporation or organization contributing $2,500 or more is a Sustainer of the Fund for the Future of the South and receives special recognition for its support.

The Southern Growth Policies Board expresses its appreciation to all those contributors who have supported and who continue to support its work. For more information about the Associate Membership Program, please write: The Southern Growth Policies Board, P.O. Box 12293, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709. Telephone (919) 941-5145.

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